A Commentary on the "De Officiis" of St. Ambrose


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Abstract

The thesis is a study of the De Officiis of St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan, A.D. 374-397. The study is in two parts: an extensive Introduction, and a Commentary on the text. The Introduction is in seven sections. Section I introduces the reader to Ambrose the author. It offers an outline of his life, a brief introduction to some of his most important works, and a look at the most celebrated events of his ecclesiastical leadership. Sections II-VII are devoted to De Officiis. Section II commences with an examination of the evidence for the title and date of the work: the correct title is De Officiis, not De Officiis Ministerum; the text is dated to the period late 388-390. Ambrose's model is introduced: the De Officiis of Cicero, which draws on the Middle Stoicism of Panaetius and Posidonius. Ambrose imitates Cicero's three-Book structure (the honestum, the utile, and the relationship of the two) as well as his title, and just as Cicero writes for his son Marcus, so Ambrose writes for his clerical 'sons', the clergy, and especially the younger clergy, of Milan. A brief synopsis of Cicero's text is given, and the parallels in Ambrose’s arrangement are pointed out. Ambrose's techniques and perspectives are considered, as are his widespread replacement of Ciceronian exempla with biblical ones and his utilisation of other sources. His allegorical and typological exegesis of Scripture is outlined. Section III of the Introduction considers some of the weaknesses in the presentation of Ambrose's argument, and considers whether work is written or sermonic in provenance. Ambrose originally preached a large proportion of the text, and the transcripts of his addresses have to some extent been reworked. Section IV examines Ambrose's aims: he seeks first to instruct his clerics, and in the longer term to transform and supersede his classical model, rather than produce a positive synthesis of pagan and Christian material. There is discussion of the extent to which Ambrose assimilates and dissents from the Stoicism of his sources. Section V discusses Ambrose's ideal for his clergy, according to De Officiis: he presents a combination of classical moralism and a pastoral theology that is anchored in the Scriptures. The social insights of the work are also highlighted. Section VI studies the Latinity of De Officiis, and Section VII offers a resume of the influence of the treatise in subsequent ecclesiastical literature in Europe. A Latin text is not included in the thesis. The commentary follows the text of Testard for Book I and that of Krabinger-Banterle for Books II-III, with some disagreements in both cases. The two pervasive sources, Cicero and Scripture, are noted throughout, and explanatory comment is on matters philosophical, historical, theological, and linguistic. The dissertation constitutes the first attempt in English to produce a detailed commentary on the entire De Officiis; it is also somewhat fuller than existing studies in other languages.
St. Ambrose, however, was not of this number, but whether in defense of the Catholic faith, of the property of the Church, or, as in his legations to Maximus, for the protection of those in peril or anxiety who sought his aid, he braved every danger, even that of death itself. During the greater part of the life of St. Ambrose many of those in power, amongst others the empress mother Justina, were Arians. Julian, though too early to affect the actions of the bishop, apostatized to paganism, which also numbered many supporters of high station. On the other hand, the influence of St. Ambrose, ex Bible Commentary Early Church Fathers Medieval Patristic. Patristic Bible Commentary. Search this site. Home. St. Thomas Aquinas on the Apostle's Creed. Catena Chapter 17. Jerome commentaries. Sitemap. Home. St. Thomas Aquinas on the Apostle's Creed. Catena Chapter 17. Jerome commentaries. Sitemap. Home. St. Thomas Aquinas on the Apostle's Creed. Catena Chapter 17. Jerome commentaries.